Introduction

The reign of Henry VIII is one of the most fascinating in English history. Not only was it a time of revolutionary political and social change, but it was also dominated by one of the most extraordinary and charismatic men to emerge in the history of the British Isles – the King's contemporaries thought him 'the greatest man in the world' and 'such a king as never before'. He ruled England in unprecedented splendour, surrounded by some of the most intriguing personalities of the age, men and women who have left behind such vivid memorials of themselves that we can almost reach out across the centuries and feel we know them personally.

Six of these people were the King's wives. It is – and was then – a remarkable fact in itself that a man should have six wives, yet what makes it especially fascinating to us is that these wives were interesting people in their own right. We are fortunate that we know so much about them – not only the major events and minutiae of their public lives, but also something of their thoughts and feelings, even the intimate details of their private lives. Henry VIII's marital affairs brought the royal marriage into public focus for the first time in our history; prior to his reign, the conjugal relationships of English sovereigns were rarely chronicled, and there remain only fragmentary details of the intimate lives of earlier kings and queens. Yet, thanks to Henry VIII, such details became a matter of public interest, and no snippet of information was thought too insignificant to be recorded and analysed, a trend that has continued

unabated for 450 years, and which has burgeoned in the twentieth century with the expansion of the media.

Thanks to the wealth of written material that has survived in the form of early biographies, letters, memoirs, account books and diplomatic reports, unprecedented in any preceding reign, we know a great deal about, and are able to make sense of, the lives of these six long-dead women. That such material was for the first time available to any sizeable extent was thanks to the humanism of the Renaissance and the widening interest in learning it engendered. There was a dramatic expansion of educational facilities, with the founding of many new colleges and schools, and literacy was now seen as being of prime importance, not only for men, but – to an increasing degree as the Tudor period progressed – for women also. The development of printing gave rise to a growth industry in popular works and tracts, which coincided with a renewed interest in history, leading to a succession of books by a new generation of chroniclers. Greater care was taken, both in England and abroad, to maintain public records, and with the evolution of intelligence systems, such as that established by Thomas Cromwell, more detailed information than ever before was accumulated.

Much of the source material for the reign of Henry VIII was collated by historians and published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, giving rise to a succession of biographies, learned and otherwise, of the King, his courtiers and his wives. Yet while there have been several excellent recent individual biographies of the wives (see *Bibliography*), there has been no serious collective biography since 1905 when M.A.S. Hume's scholarly book, *The Wives of Henry VIII* was published. This present book aims to fill that gap for the general reader, with information drawn from only the most reliable of the original sources.

What were they really like, those six wives? Because of the nature of the source material for the reign, nearly all of which has a political or religious bias, a writer could come up with very different assessments of each of them, all of which might be equally valid. But this would be abdicating some of the responsibilities of an historian, whose function is to piece together the surviving evidence and arrive at a workable conclusion. What follows are the conclusions I have

reached after many years of research into the subject, conclusions that, on the weight of the evidence, must be as realistic as anything can be after a lapse of 450 years.

Thus, we will see that Katherine of Aragon was a staunch but misguided woman of principle; Anne Boleyn an ambitious adventuress with a penchant for vengeance; Jane Seymour a strong-minded matriarch in the making; Anne of Cleves a good-humoured woman who jumped at the chance of independence; Katherine Howard an empty-headed wanton; and Katherine Parr a godly matron who was nevertheless all too human when it came to a handsome rogue. They were fascinating women, both because of who they were and what happened to them; yet we should not lose sight of the fact that, while they were queens and therefore, nominally at least, in a position of power, they were also bound to a great degree by the constraints that restricted the lives of all women at that time. We should therefore, before proceeding with their story, pause to consider those constraints.

'Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man,' wrote the Scots reformer John Knox in his treatise *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, published in 1558. In Tudor England, as in the Middle Ages, women were brought up to believe that they were vastly inferior to men. Even a queen was subordinate to the will of her husband, and – like all wives – was required to learn in silence from him 'in all subjection'. Two of Henry VIII's wives – Anne Boleyn and Katherine Parr – being highly intelligent and outspoken women, found this particularly hard, and consequently both clashed with the King on numerous occasions. Naturally, Henry won. The concept of female inferiority was older than Christianity, but centuries of Christian teaching had rigidly enforced it. Woman was an instrument of the devil, the author of original sin who would lure man away from the path to salvation – in short, the only imperfection in God's creation.

Henry VIII's wives would all have learned very early in life that, as women, they had very little personal freedom. Brought up to obey their parents without question, they found that, once married to the King, they were expected to render the same unquestioning obedience to a husband – indeed, more so than ordinary wives, for this husband also happened to be the King of England. Even widowhood brought its constraints, as Katherine of Aragon found

after her first husband died and she was left to the tender mercies of her father and father-in-law until she remarried. Only during courtship might a woman briefly gain the upper hand, as both Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour did, but woe betide her if she did not quickly learn to conform once the wedding-ring was on her finger.

The notion that women could be equal to men would have been totally foreign to the King and most of his male contemporaries. Thus women, single or married, possessed very few legal rights. A woman's body and her worldly goods both became her husband's property on marriage, and the law allowed him to do exactly as he pleased with them. Infidelity in a wife was not tolerated, but for queens Henry VIII made it a treasonable offence punishable by death, because it threatened the succession. Two of Henry's wives died on the scaffold after being found guilty of criminal intercourse, and the wife of a peer could face the same penalty if her adultery was proved and her husband petitioned the King to have her executed. A wife who murdered her husband was guilty, not of murder, but of petty treason, and the penalty for this until the eighteenth century was death by burning. Even if a wife merely displeased her husband, justifiably or not, the law allowed him to turn her out of the house with just a shift to cover her, and she had no right of redress. Wife-beating was common and, instead of provoking the horrified reaction it arouses today, 450 years ago it would have been regarded as a righteous punishment for an erring or disobedient wife, although there is no evidence that Henry VIII ever beat any of his wives.

From the cradle to the grave, the lives of Henry's queens – and of all women – were lived according to prescribed rules and conventions. Only four of the six received any formal education; Jane Seymour and Katherine Howard appear to have been barely literate. Many people in the first half of the sixteenth century still did not believe that women should be educated, holding to the medieval view that girls taught to write would only waste their skill on love-letters. But thanks to men such as the Spanish educationist Juan Luis Vives, and Sir Thomas More, whose daughters were renowned examples of womanly erudition, as well as the shining examples of both Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Parr who proved that women could be both learned and virtuous, the Renaissance concept of

female education gradually became accepted and even applauded. Nevertheless, the Elizabethan bluestocking was not yet born; in Henry VIII's time, the education of girls was the privilege of the royal and the rich, and its chief aim was to produce future wives schooled in godly and moral precepts. It was not intended to promote independent thinking; indeed, it tended to the opposite.

When it came to choosing a marriage partner, high-born girls – and princesses in particular – were at the mercy of their fathers, for it was almost unheard of for them to select their own husbands. One married for political reasons, to cement alliances, to gain wealth, land and status, and to forge bonds between families; marrying for love was merely wayward and foolish. Royal marriages, of course, were largely matters of political expediency: it was not unknown for a king to see his bride's face for the first time on their wedding day, and it was still thought unusual for a king to marry one of his own subjects. Kings were expected to ally themselves with foreign powers for political and trading advantages, and had done so until 1464 when Henry's grandfather, Edward IV, had married Elizabeth Woodville, a commoner, for love alone, and caused a furore. Half a century later, a burgeoning sense of English nationalism meant that Henry VIII's marriages to four commoners passed without anyone complaining that they were not of royal blood. What did excite comment was that he had married them for love, a sensational departure from tradition. In a sense, however, these were political marriages too, since the political and religious factions at Henry's court were continually trying to manoeuvre their master in and out of wedlock.

Negotiations for marriages between royal houses could be – and often were – very protracted. It took thirteen years to arrange the marriage of Katherine of Aragon and Arthur Tudor; fortunately – as so often happened – negotiations began when both were toddlers. Royal courtship in such cases consisted of formal letters containing fulsome declarations of love, and symbolic gifts, usually rings or jewels. Unless a bride was being reared at her future husband's court, geographical barriers often prevented the couple from meeting. Kings had to rely on the accuracy of descriptions sent by ambassadors, and also on the artistry of court painters, though there were notable

mishaps: Holbein painted Anne of Cleves, but in doing so unduly flattered the lady, and a distraught Henry was driven to complain that it was 'the fate of princes to take as is brought them by others, while poor men be commonly at their own choice'.

There was no legal age for marriage in the sixteenth century. Marriage between children was not unknown, but the usual age of both partners was around fourteen or fifteen, old enough for cohabitation. No one questioned whether young people were mature enough to marry and procreate at such an early age: life expectancy was short, and the average woman could not expect to live much beyond thirty. In this context, therefore, all of Henry's wives except Katherine Howard married him at quite a late age. Katherine of Aragon was twenty-four (it was her second marriage), Anne Boleyn around thirty-two, Jane Seymour twenty-eight, Anne of Cleves twenty-four, and Katherine Parr thirty-one (her third marriage). By contrast, Katherine Howard was only fifteen or thereabouts when Henry, at the age of forty-nine, took her to wife, and the bride's youth excited much comment.

A formal betrothal was called a precontract; in the case of a royal union, its terms and conditions were set out in a formal marriage treaty. A precontract could be in written form, or consist of a verbal promise to marry made before witnesses. Once it had been made, only sexual intercourse was necessary to transform it into marriage, and many couples lived together quite respectably after having conformed to this custom. Some, of course, went on to take their vows in church, but this was not a necessity except in the case of a royal or noble union, such as that between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, which came about in this way, but which was later regularised by a ceremony of marriage.

The dowry, or marriage portion, was always the chief issue in any betrothal contract. A dowry could consist of lands, money, jewellery, plate, even household goods, and a girl's chances of marriage depended more upon her father's financial and social status than upon her face and form, although these sometimes helped. Even the plainest girl, if she had a rich dowry, would never lack for suitors. The contract would also feature the terms of the bride's jointure, settled upon her by her husband-to-be or his father, for her maintenance after marriage and during widowhood. Yet it was never

hers to control directly unless her husband permitted it, or unless she was widowed and did not remarry.

Without a precontract, sex before marriage was forbidden, although, of course, it was a frequent occurrence that was not just confined to the lower orders of society. As Katherine Howard's experiences prove, lax morality could prevail among the nobility also. Men, however, were encouraged to sow their wild oats, but a woman who did so became a social outcast and ruined her chances of making a good marriage. For this reason, Henry VIII conducted his courtships of Katherine Howard and Jane Seymour in the presence of their relatives, in order to preserve the good reputation of his future wives.

Weddings themselves were performed according to ancient Roman Catholic rites, with vows being exchanged in the church porch, followed by a nuptial mass at the high altar. Two witnesses had to be present. The old form of the service then in use required the bride to vow to be 'bonair and buxom [amiable] in bed and at board'. Henry VIII's weddings were all solemnised in private ceremonies, with only a few selected courtiers present. Only three were marked by public celebrations afterwards: those to Katherine of Aragon, Jane Seymour and Anne of Cleves. The date and place of the King's marriage to Anne Boleyn were kept so secret that even Archbishop Cranmer could not be certain about them. This is not to say, however, that the modern concept of a royal wedding, with all its attendant pageantry, was unknown. Public royal weddings had been the rule up until the reign of Henry VIII, and that of his parents, Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, in 1486 at Westminster Abbey was a very public affair, as was the wedding of Katherine of Aragon and Arthur Tudor at St Paul's Cathedral in 1501. Indeed, the ceremonies observed, the procession through the streets, and the cheering crowds, were not so very different from those that a worldwide television audience saw when the present Prince of Wales married Lady Diana Spencer on the same site 480 years later.

The English had a fondness for traditional customs, and celebrated their weddings with feasting and a good deal of bawdy revelry. Dancing would follow the nuptial banquet, and then the bride and groom would be ceremoniously put to bed by the guests, the marriage bed being blessed by a priest before the couple were left

alone to consummate their marriage. There is, however, no record of Henry VIII being publicly put to bed with any of his wives, although Katherine of Aragon was with Prince Arthur, in front of many witnesses.

Once the marriage had been consummated, the couple were literally viewed as one flesh, and Sir Thomas More advised them to regard their sexual union as being similar to 'God's coupling with their souls'. Theological doctrine inclined to the view that all carnal relationships were of a base and sinful nature; only the sacrament of marriage made the 'damnable act' 'pure, clean, and without spot of sin'. However, although instances of marital sex did not have to be mentioned in the confessional, the marriage ceremony was not intended as a gateway to self-indulgent lust. The Church taught that sex was only for the procreation of children, that the Word of God might be handed down to future generations; sex was therefore a sacred duty in marriage. 'Who does not tremble when he considers how to deal with his wife?' asked Henry VIII in his treatise *A Defence of the Seven Sacraments*; 'for not only is he bound to love her, but so to live with her that he may return her to God pure and without stain, when God who gave shall demand His own again.'

Marriage brought with it further constraints for women. Matrimony was essential to the Tudor concept of the divine order of the world: the husband ruled his family, as the King ruled his realm, and as God ruled the universe, and – like subjects – wives were bound in obedience to their husbands and masters. In 1537, Sir Thomas Wyatt advised his son to 'rule his wife well' so that she would love and reverence him 'as her head'. 'I am utterly of the opinion,' wrote Thomas Lupset in *An Exhortation to Young Men* (1535), 'that the man may make, shape and form the woman as he will.' Certainly this was what Henry VIII expected to do as a husband. In his eyes, and in those of other men of his era, a loving, virtuous and obedient wife was a blessing direct from God. But for women, even queens, marriage often brought with it total subjection to and domination by a domestic tyrant.

Marriage was therefore a period of great upheaval and adjustment for young women, and even more so for those born royal, for a princess often had to face a perilous journey to a new land and a stranger she had never before set eyes on, as well as a heart-

wrenching parting from parents, siblings, friends, home and native land, all of which she might never see again. If she were clever, however, a royal bride could come to enjoy considerable power and influence, as did both Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. Yet such status and power emanated solely from her husband. She enjoyed no freedoms but those he permitted her. Without him, she was nothing.

Queens of England were housewives on a grand scale, with nominal charge of vast households and far-flung estates from which they derived huge revenues. In fact, they had an army of officials to administer these for them, and only controlled their own income to the degree permitted them by the King; no major transactions would be conducted without his consent. Any decisions they made concerning finances, patronage, benefactions, estate management and household matters were subject to his approval; their privy council was an advisory body appointed by him to oversee their affairs on his behalf. There is evidence that Henry VIII was in fact happy to leave a good many domestic decisions to his wives' discretion, and was certainly generous with money when the mood took him. He could also be callous when he felt the need, and was not above reminding Anne Boleyn that he had the power to lower her more than he had raised her, leaving her in no doubt as to who held the upper hand.

What was really required of a queen was that she produce heirs for the succession and set a high moral standard for court and kingdom by being a model of wifely dignity and virtue. To depart from this role could spell disaster, as both Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard found to their cost. Katherine was certainly promiscuous, but Anne merely lacked the necessary modesty, circumspection and humility of manner; thus it was easy for her contemporaries to believe her guilty of moral laxity.

A queen's formal dignity was reinforced by the clothes and jewels she wore, and nowhere were the constraints upon women as obvious as when it came to the rules governing their attire. The everyday dress of a married woman was preordained by convention. Hair that had been worn loose before marriage must now be hidden under a hood and veil; only queens might have their hair flowing after marriage, and then only on state occasions when it was necessary to

wear a crown. Women only cut their hair to enter a cloister; most wore it long – Anne Boleyn and Katherine of Aragon both had hair so long they could sit on it. Widows were required to wear a nun-like wimple and chin-barbe, familiar on portraits of the Lady Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII's mother. This practice was dying out by the time of the Reformation, although for some time afterwards widows would wear severe white caps or hoods.

Even in summer, sleeves were required to reach the wrist, and gowns were worn long, sweeping the floor. Such were the dictates of modesty, which also required a woman to suffer agonising constriction within a corset of stiff leather or even wood. Yet it was not thought indecent to wear gowns with a square neckline low enough to expose most of the upper breasts; in an age when hand-reared babies rarely survived, the sight of a female breast was a common one and excited little censure.

The sumptuous attire of queens provided yet further limitation; the heavy velvets and damasks used, the long court trains, the elaborate head-dresses, and the cumbersome oversleeves, all had the effect of severely restricting movement. Queens walked slowly, danced slowly, and moved with regal bearing, not just because they were born to it, but because their clothes constrained them to it. Yet they did not complain – like many women in all periods of history, they were willing to suffer in the cause of fashion.

The chief function of a queen – and of the wives of lesser men, for that matter – was to bear her husband male heirs to ensure the continuity of his dynasty. Pregnancy could be, and often was, an annual event – from the male point of view, a highly satisfactory state, although not so satisfactory for those wives who were worn out with frequent childbearing, or for the high proportion of women and babies who died in childbed. Pregnancy and childbirth were extremely hazardous. As well as preparing a layette and a nursery, an expectant mother would, as a matter of routine, make provision for someone to care for her child in the event of her dying at its birth. And even if she survived the birth, she might be physically scarred for life. This is not the place to discuss the truly horrific things that could happen to a woman in childbed – suffice it to say that lack of medical knowledge (only midwives attended confinements, doctors were rarely called in unless it was to deal with severe complications)

and the absence of any real understanding of hygiene were what really killed women.

A woman who bore ten children could expect to see less than half grow to full maturity if she were lucky. Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn had ten pregnancies between them: two children survived. Caesarian section and forceps were unknown, and many babies died at birth. Given the problems with the feeding and management of babies that prevailed at the time, it is surprising that any survived at all. Many were given unsuitable foods, and there were no antibiotics; any chance infection could carry an infant off with hardly a warning. A mother could herself be at risk, even after the birth was successfully over, for at any time during her lying-in period, puerperal fever could strike; Jane Seymour died of this, probably because a tear in her perineum became infected. In this respect, marriage brought no real security to women; in all too many cases, they died as a result of it.

In an age of arranged marriages, a wife could not expect her husband to be faithful. Marriages were business arrangements, pleasure could be found elsewhere. Adultery in men was common, and Henry VIII is known to have strayed frequently during his first two marriages. Nor did he expect to be censured for it: he once brutally advised Anne Boleyn to shut her eyes as her betters had done when she dared to upbraid him for being unfaithful.

The medieval tradition of courtly love still flourished at the Tudor court. It was a code of behaviour by which the chivalrous knight paid court to the lady of his heart, who was usually older, married and of higher rank – and thus conveniently unattainable. A man could refer to his 'mistress' in the noblest sense, without implying that there was any sexual relationship, yet all too often the courtly ideal was merely an excuse for adultery. We shall see that Henry VIII was a great exponent of this chivalric cult, a concept inbred in him from infancy, and which inspired the courtship of all of his wives as well as the pursuit of his mistresses.

Marriage, however, was as far removed from courtly love as night from day. Once married, couples had to make the best of things, however bad, for there was rarely a way out. Divorce was very rare, and was only granted by Act of Parliament in exceptional cases, usually involving adultery among the nobility. Annulment by an

ecclesiastical court, or even by the Pope, was more common, but the only grounds permissible were non-consummation of the marriage, discovery of a near degree of affinity, insanity, or the discovery of a previous precontract to someone else. Where a couple were within the forbidden degrees of affinity, the Pope was usually happy to issue a dispensation before the marriage took place. The validity of such a dispensation was accepted without question in Europe until Henry VIII brought his suit against Katherine of Aragon in 1527, claiming that the Pope had contravened Levitical law by issuing a dispensation allowing him to marry his brother's widow. Such a stand, taken at a crucial time in the history of the Church, was enough to rend Christendom asunder.

To today's liberated women and 'new men', the lives of Henry VIII's wives appear to have been shockingly narrow and hemmed by intolerable constraints. Yet, having experienced nothing else, they did not think to question these, and accepted their inferior status as part of the divine order of things. Katherine Parr even applauded it; in her book, *The Lamentations of a Sinner*, published in 1548, she exhorted wives to wear 'such apparel as becometh holiness and comely usage with soberness', and warned them against the evils of overeating and drinking wine. Young women, she said, must be 'sober minded, love their husbands and children, and be discreet, housewifely, and good'. Henry VIII was dead when these words were written, but we may certainly read in them a reflection of his own views. Jane Seymour took as her motto the legend 'Bound to obey and serve', while Katherine Howard's was 'No other will than his'. They, like the King's other wives, accepted their subjugation; it was the price of their queenship and of marriage.

Part I

Katherine of Aragon

I
The princess from Spain

The child, thought the ambassadors, was delightful, 'singularly beautiful'. Seated upon the lap of her mother, the Queen of Castile, she was gravely surveying the important yet deferential men who were taking such polite and fulsome interest in her. Only two years old in the spring of 1488, the Infanta Katherine of Aragon was already displaying the plump prettiness that was to enchant her two future husbands. Her wide blue eyes gazed from a round, firm-chinned face, which was framed by wavy, red-gold hair, worn loose as was the custom for princesses at that time. She sat with her mother on a dais in the midst of the court of Castile and Aragon, which had gathered for a brief respite in the wars against the Infidel to enjoy a tournament. And, during the interval, when the contesting knights had withdrawn to their tents, the English ambassadors, sent by King Henry VII, came to pay their respects.

Queen Isabella, sovereign of Castile in her own right, and her husband Ferdinand of Aragon were well aware of their purpose. They came from a king whose title to his crown was dubious, to say the least. Although three years had now elapsed since Henry Tudor had usurped the throne of England after defeating Richard III, the last Plantagenet king, at the battle of Bosworth, he was still working hard to consolidate his position. He had, in fact, no title at all to the crown by descent; therefore he professed to claim it by right of conquest and through a questionable descent from the early British kings – not for nothing did he name his eldest son, born in 1486, Arthur. Neverthe-

less, there were still living at least six male members of the House of Plantagenet with a better lineal claim to the throne than Henry VII, and he knew it. Ferdinand and Isabella knew it too, and they were sensible of the fact that a marriage alliance between England and one of the great European powers would imply recognition of Henry VII's title and immeasurably strengthen his position both in his own kingdom and in the eyes of the world at large.

There were, at that time, two major powers in Europe: France and Spain. English distrust of the French, engendered by nearly 200 years of war, forced Henry VII to consider a more congenial alliance for his son with Spain, then a new political entity. Until 1479, Spain had been made up of a group of minor kingdoms ruled by interrelated monarchs, and since the eighth century, much of the Spanish peninsula had been held by the Moors. Slowly, the Christian rulers had reclaimed the land. The 'Reconquest' had been going on for centuries, an internal crusade that absorbed Spanish energies and kept her to a large extent out of European politics. This long struggle against the Moors was in fact the greatest source of a sense of national identity, and the biggest single unifying factor, more so even than the marriage between Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile that brought the Spanish kingdoms together under a single monarchy. No Spanish rulers were more zealous in eliminating the Moors than Ferdinand and Isabella, and by 1488 only the Moorish kingdom of Granada remained unconquered by the Christians. The sovereigns were rulers of the rest of the Iberian peninsula, save for the kingdom of Portugal, and it would only be a matter of time before Granada too came under their dominion. Spain was therefore taking its place as a major European power.

Ferdinand and Isabella represented everything that seemed desirable to Henry VII: they were the descendants of ancient monarchies, their position was strong, and their reputation glorious. If they could be persuaded to agree to a marriage alliance between Prince Arthur and one of their four daughters, then the Tudor dynasty would be far more secure than hitherto. Moreover, Spain and France were hereditary enemies, and therefore a joint pact between England and Spain would benefit both sides. The Spanish sovereigns were well aware of the potential advantages to themselves of such an alliance, but they were in no hurry to make a commitment. Ferdinand was as

wily a politician as Henry Tudor, and was not prepared to sign any treaties until he could be sure that the English King was firmly established on his throne. Given England's susceptibility to dynastic warfare, it seemed more than likely that Henry VII might not long enjoy his regal dignity.

There was, however, something that Ferdinand desired very much, and that was military assistance against the French. In March 1488, the Spanish ambassador at the English court was Dr Roderigo de Puebla, an unscrupulous diplomat of Jewish origins. Ferdinand had instructed him to offer Henry an infanta for his son in return for an undertaking on Henry's part to declare war on France. The King of England had reacted enthusiastically to the proposal, and promptly despatched his ambassadors to Spain to view the sovereigns' youngest daughter, Katherine.

A Spanish herald, Ruy Machado, was moved to comment on the charming impression made on the envoys by both the little girl and her mother, the Queen. At the same time, in England, Henry VII was welcoming Ferdinand's representatives and enthusiastically showing off his nineteen-month-old son, first dressed in cloth of gold and then stripped naked, so they could see he had no deformity. The Spaniards saw an auburn-haired, fair-skinned child who was tall for his age, and thought him both beautiful and graceful, with 'many excellent qualities'.

Ferdinand and Isabella were impressed by their reports, but still not happy about sending their daughter to a realm whose king might be deposed at any time. As Puebla told Henry VII quite candidly in July, 'Bearing in mind what happens every day to the kings of England, it is surprising that Ferdinand and Isabella should dare think of giving their daughter at all.' But at last Ferdinand decided that assistance against France was more important to him than his daughter's future security, and instructed his ambassadors to draw up a treaty of marriage. There was some haggling between the representatives of both sides over the financial settlement to be made on the bride, but this was settled amicably and it was agreed that the Infanta should bring with her a dowry of 200,000 crowns (equivalent to about £5 million today). The alliance was ratified, and the dowry confirmed, by the Treaty of Medina del Campo, which was signed by the Spanish sovereigns on 27 March 1489. Thus Katherine's

matrimonial future was decided when she was three years old, a common fate of princesses at that time.

Katherine of Aragon was named after her English great-grandmother, Katherine of Lancaster, a daughter of John of Gaunt (a younger son of Edward III), who had married Henry III of Castile in 1388 and died in 1418. Her son by Henry succeeded his father as John I, and married his cousin, Isabella of Portugal; they were the parents of Isabella of Castile. Isabella had been born into a land ravaged by war, both dynastic and holy. Her brother, Henry IV, was a spineless weakling, and her mother went insane when she was a girl. Fortunately, in 1469 a marriage was arranged for Isabella with her cousin, Ferdinand of Aragon, a vigorous youth eleven months her junior. In 1474, Henry IV died childless, and Isabella became Queen of Castile in her own right.

The new Queen was of middle height with a good figure that would soon be ruined by ten pregnancies in quick succession. She had skin so fair it looked white, and her eyes were a greeny blue. She was graceful, beautiful, modest and pious, but was also blessed with a sense of humour and boundless energy. She was both clever and sensible, and turned a blind eye to her husband's many infidelities, although she loved him dearly. Her only fault, as noted by her contemporaries, was her love of ostentation in dress, for, like her daughter Katherine in later years, she was 'a ceremonious woman in her attire', favouring the rich velvets and cloth of gold so typical of the period.

In 1479, the King of Aragon died and Ferdinand succeeded him. Thus, for the first time in her history, Spain became united under centralised rule, with only the Moorish Kingdom of Granada refusing allegiance to the sovereigns. The reconquest of this Infidel bastion was to be the great enterprise of their reign, to which they would devote most of their time and resources. Campaign followed campaign, with the ever growing family of the King and Queen being trailed after them in the wake of their army, from city to city, through inhospitable and hostile territory, the monarchs themselves sometimes suffering gruelling privation in their quest for a holy victory.

This left the Queen with little time to devote to her children. Her

first child, Isabella, was born in 1470, and was followed in rapid succession over the next fifteen years by nine others. Sadly, all the campaigning took its toll: five babies died young. However, the rest grew to maturity. An heir to the throne, the Infante John, was born in 1478; then there was Juana, born in 1479, Maria in 1482, and Katherine (who was called Catalina in her native land), born on the night of 15–16 December 1485 in the palace of the Bishop of Toledo at Alcala de Henares, in the midst of war. The Queen had been in the saddle all day, and rose from her bed the day after the birth to go back on the march, consigning her youngest daughter to the care of nurses. Nevertheless, she cared deeply for all her children, and personally supervised their education. They, in turn, all loved and respected her, especially Katherine, who grew up to be the most like her in looks and character.

While Isabella lived, Katherine had a champion who would consider her welfare and security before all else. Yet Katherine was Ferdinand's daughter as well, and he was very different from her mother. In appearance he was of medium height with a well-proportioned body, and had long dark hair and a good complexion. He was genial, charismatic and a good conversationalist. Like his wife, he possessed great energy which he put to good use on military campaigns but also expended on women. His contemporaries thought him compassionate, yet this did not always extend to his own family; he later abandoned one daughter to penury and had another declared insane in order to seize her kingdom. He was notorious as a great dissimulator, and for being fond of political intrigue. Yet for all his failings, he loved his wife, and theirs was a dynamic and successful partnership.

The only glimpse we have of Katherine of Aragon during her childhood is at the tournament where she was presented to the English ambassadors. Yet she was an innocent witness to most of the great landmarks of her parents' reign: the fall of Granada in 1492, the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, and the establishment of the notorious Spanish Inquisition. All of these things served to enhance the reputation of Ferdinand and Isabella as champions of the Catholic Church; Spain's prestige in the world had never been higher.

After the conquest of Granada, the four infantas were sent there to

live in the Moorish palace of the Alhambra. There they grew to maturity and were educated among the arched courtyards and splashing fountains where once the caliphs had kept their harem. The Christian princesses rarely left their sunny home, except for the great occasions of state at which their presence was required. Katherine's tutor, appointed by her mother, was a clerk in holy orders, Alessandro Geraldini, who would later accompany her to England as her chaplain. Her education was very much in the medieval tradition, although Erasmus, the celebrated Dutch humanist, who met Katherine in England, tells us that she was 'imbued with learning, by the care of her illustrious mother'. She learned to write with a graceful hand, and improved her mind with devotional reading, but she was also taught the traditional feminine skills of needlework and dancing, lacemaking, and embroidery in the Spanish 'black-work' style, which she would later popularise in England. Before her eyes was the image of her pious mother as the supreme example of Christian queenship, an example that Katherine would try to emulate all her life.

Ferdinand and Isabella arranged advantageous marriages for all their children, although none turned out as successfully as they had hoped. Isabella was married in 1490 to the Infante Alfonso of Portugal. Although it was an arranged marriage, the young couple quickly fell in love, but their happiness was shattered when, only seven months later, Alfonso was killed after a fall from his horse. His widow returned to Spain declaring it was her intention to enter a nunnery, but Ferdinand was having none of this, and after protracted negotiations sent her back to Portugal in 1497 to marry Alfonso's cousin, King Manuel I. In 1498, Isabella died giving birth to a son, the Infante Miguel, who only lived two years. Manuel would later remarry, and his bride would be Isabella's younger sister Maria.

Juana, the second daughter of the sovereigns, was volatile and highly unstable, yet her parents arranged for her an even more glorious marriage. Their fame had led many princes to seek alliance with them, one such being the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I, Hapsburg ruler of vast territories, including Austria, parts of Germany, Burgundy and the Low Countries. He had two gifted children, Philip and Margaret, and Ferdinand and Isabella were happy to ally themselves with Maximilian by marriages between

Philip and Juana and Margaret of Austria and the Infante John, the heir to Spain.

Juana and Philip were married in 1496. Philip was not for nothing nicknamed 'the Handsome', and Juana fell violently and possessively in love with him, with the predictable result that he soon tired of her and took mistresses. This provoked his wife to terrible rages, and her behaviour became a public scandal both in Flanders and Spain. Reports of it reached Queen Isabella, who was deeply troubled by them, yet powerless to do very much to alter the situation. However, Juana's mental instability did not affect her fertility, and she produced six children, her eldest son Charles being born in 1500 at Ghent.

Her brother John fared rather better in his marriage, which took place in 1497. He was a pleasant youth who excelled in all the knightly virtues and who had captured the hearts of his future subjects. His constitution, however, was delicate, and Ferdinand and Isabella were concerned that his spirited and robust bride would wear him out. Their fears were well founded, too, for the Infante died only six months after his marriage, leaving Margaret of Austria pregnant with a child that was later stillborn. This meant that the Infanta Isabella was now the heiress to the Spanish throne, and when she bore her son Miguel in 1498, there were great celebrations, in spite of her death in childbirth, for Spain once more had a male heir. Yet when Miguel succumbed to a childish illness in 1500, the unstable Juana became heiress to the sovereigns, which was naturally a matter of concern to them, though at least she had a healthy son of her own.

Queen Isabella grieved deeply for the loss of her children and grandchildren, which made her remaining unmarried daughter, Katherine, seem all the more precious to her. Throughout these years of marriages and tragedy, negotiations had dragged on for Katherine's wedding to Prince Arthur, and Isabella was now determined to ensure that her daughter's future would be as secure and happy as she could make it. In 1493, when Katherine was seven years old, it had been decided that she would go to England in 1498, when she was twelve. In 1497, Henry VII sent her 'a blessed ring' as a token of his fatherly affection. She could not remember a time when she had not been referred to as the Princess of Wales, and from the

age of two she had been schooled for her destiny as Queen of England. She had been brought up in the knowledge that one day she must leave Spain and her parents for ever, being told that such was the fate of all princesses like her. As she had been reared to absolute obedience to the will of her parents, she did not question this.

In August 1497, Katherine and Arthur were formally betrothed at the ancient palace of Woodstock in Oxfordshire, Dr de Puebla standing proxy for the bride. Katherine did not go to England in 1498; the date of her arrival was postponed until September 1500, when Prince Arthur would be fourteen and capable of consummating the marriage. There was concern at the English court that the bride would find it difficult to make herself understood when she arrived there, and both Queen Elizabeth and the Lady Margaret Beaufort, the King's mother, requested the sovereigns of Spain to ensure that Katherine always spoke French – the diplomatic language of Europe – with her sister-in-law Margaret of Austria, as they themselves did not understand Latin or Spanish. They also suggested that Katherine accustom herself to drink wine, as the water of England was not drinkable. In December 1497, Queen Elizabeth wrote to Queen Isabella asking to be kept informed of the health and safety of her future daughter-in-law 'whom we think of and esteem as our own daughter'.

The Spanish marriage alliance was popular in England, and Henry VII and his subjects were impatient to see the girl who would one day be Queen Consort of England. Spain's second ambassador at the English court, Don Pedro de Ayala, boldly suggested to the sovereigns that it would be a good thing if Katherine came to England soon in order to accustom herself to the way of life and learn the language. He thought she could only lead a happy life by 'not remembering those things which would make her less enjoy what she would find here'. However, considering the manners and way of life of the English, he thought it best if she did not come until she was of marriageable age. Ferdinand was in no hurry: the recent appearance of a new pretender to the English throne, Perkin Warbeck – an imposter – and the continued existence of the Earl of Warwick, who had a very good claim to it, had made him cautious, and if another, better match had presented itself for his daughter at that time he would have accepted it. However, he did agree to a proxy

wedding taking place on 19 May 1499 at Prince Arthur's manor house at Bewdley near Worcester. Again Dr de Puebla acted as proxy for the bride, and the Prince declared to him in a loud clear voice that he much rejoiced to contract the marriage because of his deep and sincere love for the Princess his wife, whom of course he had never seen. Such courtesies were the order of the day, however superficial.

Prince Arthur wrote several letters to his bride, of which only one survives, dated October 1499 and written in Latin to 'my dearest spouse'. In it he acknowledges the 'sweet letters' sent to him by her (none of which are extant), which so delighted him that he fancied he conversed with and embraced her. 'I cannot tell you what an earnest desire I feel to see your Highness, and how vexatious to me is this procrastination about your coming. Let [it] be hastened, [that] the love conceived between us and the wished-for joys may reap their proper fruit.' Such florid and adult sentiments from the pen of a thirteen-year-old boy hint at the assistance of a tutor, yet nevertheless it must have been a comfort to Katherine to receive encouragement from her future husband.

There remained only one obstacle to Katherine's departure for England, and that was the young Earl of Warwick, the nephew of Edward IV and Richard III, who was then a prisoner in the Tower. Ferdinand now made it very clear to Henry VII that unless Warwick were eliminated Katherine would never set foot in England, and Henry, anxious to preserve at all costs his friendship with Spain and the benefits the marriage alliance would bring, acted at once. Warwick was arraigned on a charge of conspiring with the pretender Perkin Warbeck; the simple-minded youth, beguiled by an *agent provocateur*, pleaded guilty, but was sentenced to death for his co-operation and beheaded on Tower Hill in November 1499. There was now nothing to stand in the way of Katherine's wedding to Arthur. Yet not for nothing would she one day say that her marriage had been made in blood, nor would she ever cease to feel an irrational sense of responsibility for the young Earl's death.

In 1500, assured by Dr de Puebla that 'not a doubtful drop of royal blood remains in England', the sovereigns began to prepare for their daughter's departure from Spain. Henry VII, in turn, was commanding the Mayor and aldermen of the City of London to arrange a lavish reception for his son's bride. He also requested that only

beautiful women be sent in the Princess's train, stipulating that 'at least, none of them should be ugly.' We do not know if Queen Isabella took this into account when appointing the ladies of her daughter's household; for her, the main criterion was that they should come from the noblest and most ancient families of Spain. There was also a trousseau to be assembled. Katherine was to take with her many fine gowns of velvet and cloth of gold and silver, cut in the Spanish fashion, as well as undergarments edged with fine black-work lace, and hoods of velvet braided with gold, silver or pearls. The latter she would need after her marriage, when convention required a wife to cover her hair; only on state occasions would she wear it loose. Then there were night robes edged with lace for summer and fur for winter, cloth stockings and wooden stays, as well as the stiff Spanish farthingales that belled out the skirts of her gowns. Also in the trousseau was the gold and silver plate which was part of Katherine's dowry, and her jewellery, some of which was very fine and included heavy collar chains and crucifixes, and large brooches to be pinned to the centre of Katherine's bodices beneath the square necklines that would stay fashionable, and plunge ever lower, for the next sixty years. Lastly, a reminder to the Princess of where her duty lay, the Queen packed a beautifully embroidered christening robe.

When Isabella heard of Henry VII's extravagant plans for Katherine's reception, she was quick to write and tell him that she and Ferdinand would prefer it if 'expenses were moderate', as they did not want their daughter to be the cause of any loss to England; 'on the contrary, we desire that she will be the source of all kinds of happiness.' Isabella hoped, she said, that 'the substantial part of the festival should be his love'. But Henry was determined that this, the first major state occasion since his coronation, should be celebrated on a lavish scale in order to underline the splendour of the Tudor dynasty. In March 1501, he paid £14,000 for jewels alone for the wedding, and the City of London was sparing no expense in its plans for a magnificent reception for the Infanta. Already, workmen were building a great platform outside St Paul's Cathedral so that the crowds might witness the young couple taking their vows, and as this was a popular marriage there was mounting excitement in London.

In April 1501, Queen Isabella announced that her daughter was ready. Accordingly, on 19 May, another proxy wedding ceremony took place at Bewdley, just to make sure that nothing could be found lacking in the first. Two days later, Katherine left the Alhambra for ever, and began the first stage of her journey to the port of Corunna, whence she was to take ship for England. She took her final leave of her parents in Granada, knowing full well that she might never see them again. Isabella had carefully chosen a duenna for her, Doña Elvira Manuel, a noblewoman of mature years, who would act as chief lady-in-waiting, governess, chaperon, and general mother substitute. Doña Elvira was stern and proud, yet she was zealous in protecting her charge and concerned for her welfare. Only in later years, when Katherine began to resent the strict etiquette she imposed, did a rift develop between them.

The Infanta's household was headed by the Count and Countess de Cabra. It included the Commander Mayor Cardenas, Don Pedro Manuel (the duenna's husband), a chamberlain, Juan de Diero, Katherine's chaplain Alessandro Geraldini, three bishops and a host of ladies, gentlemen and servants. Travel in those days was by litter or on horseback; the strict conventions of the Spanish court demanded that Katherine's face be veiled in public, and that she travel behind the closed curtains of a litter, even during the hot summer months.

Katherine and her suite arrived at Corunna on 20 July, but could not embark for England until 17 August because of unfavourable winds. The sea crossing was terrible: a violent storm blew up in the Bay of Biscay, and the ship was tossed for four days in rough seas. Katherine was very sea-sick and later wrote to her mother to say 'it was impossible not to be terrified by the storm'. The captain was forced to return to Spain, and docked at Laredo on the Castilian coast for a month while the tempests raged. At last, on 27 September, the winds died down, and Katherine once more stepped on board the ship that would take her to England. Five days later, it arrived at Plymouth in Devon.

2
A true and loving husband

As Katherine walked down the gangway, followed by her retinue, the first thing she saw through her veil was the Mayor of Plymouth and his aldermen, come to welcome her to England. The townsfolk were there too, cheering and waving, and there were banners in the streets. Señor Alcares, a gentleman in the Infanta's train, wrote to Queen Isabella that Katherine 'could not have been received with greater joy if she had been the saviour of the world'. After being served a great feast by the citizens of Plymouth, Katherine heard mass and gave thanks for her safe arrival in her adoptive land. Meanwhile, a royal messenger was speeding away to the King, to tell him that the Princess whose arrival he had awaited for thirteen years was actually in his kingdom.

From Plymouth, Katherine travelled eastwards on the road to London. Along the way, people who had heard of her coming lined the roads to see the mysterious veiled lady who would one day be their queen. When Henry VII received news of her arrival, it was already November, and he set off at once from the royal manor at Easthampstead, Berkshire, with Prince Arthur. In Hampshire, word reached the King that Katherine was lodged at the bishop's palace at Dogmersfield; Henry, Arthur and the lords of the Privy Council arrived there on the evening of 4 November, eager to see her.

The Count de Cabra and Doña Elvira met Henry at the door and politely informed him that Katherine had retired for the night and could see no one. Henry was first astonished and then, typically,

suspicious. Why would they not let him see his daughter-in-law? What was wrong with her? Was she deformed or ugly? His temper rose; he insisted he would see her, even if she were in bed. After some argument, the Spaniards had to agree to his demand and admit him to the Princess's rooms. Here, a mute and outraged Doña Elvira presented the Infanta, heavily veiled, to King Henry, who, with a marked lack of patience, lifted the veil. His relief was evident, for the ambassador had not lied: Katherine was a very pretty girl, with no sign of any blemish or deformity.

There are still in existence several portraits of Katherine of Aragon, painted at different stages of her life. Two early ones, said with good reason to portray her, were painted by the Spanish artist, Miguel Sittow. The earlier, thought to be Katherine posing as Mary Magdalene, is in the Berg Collection, and shows a plump, heavy-featured girl with loose wavy golden hair, aged perhaps around fifteen years. The other portrait, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, was executed around 1505, and shows what must be the same young woman, with round face and golden hair, eyes demurely lowered, wearing a brown velvet dress and a black velvet hood called a béguine. The sitter wears a heavy gold collar decorated with Ks and pomegranates; this fruit, symbol of fertility, was Katherine's personal badge. On this, and the strong resemblance to Isabella of Castile, rests the identification of the sitter with Katherine of Aragon.

These two portraits give us a good idea of what Henry VII saw when he lifted Katherine's veil on that November evening in 1501, a girl with a fair complexion, rich reddish-gold hair that fell below hip level, and blue eyes. It would be interesting to know Katherine's first impression of her father-in-law, that unknown Welshman who had usurped the Plantagenet throne sixteen years earlier.

Henry Tudor came from bastard stock. His mother, Margaret Beaufort, was his only link by blood to the Plantagenets, and she herself was descended from the bastards born to John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, fourth son of Edward III, and his mistress Katherine Swynford. These children, all surnamed Beaufort, were legitimised by statute of Richard II in 1397, after Gaunt married their mother; however, ten years later, Henry IV, confirming this, added a rider to the statute which barred the Beauforts and their heirs from

ever inheriting the crown. Thus Henry Tudor could claim only a disputed title to it through his mother. His father, Edmund Tudor, who died before he was born, was one of the offspring of Henry V's widow, Katherine of Valois, by her liaison with the Welsh groom of her wardrobe, Owen Tudor; there is no proof that they ever married. Henry VII therefore had an extremely dubious claim to his throne, and was well aware of the fact that every single surviving member of the Plantagenet House of York had more right to occupy it than he. Nevertheless, after half a century of civil war, what England needed was firm, stable government, and this Henry VII had provided. He had also eliminated his most dangerous rivals for the crown. His marriage to the Plantagenet heiress, Elizabeth of York, had in the eyes of many gone a long way towards cloaking his usurpation with the mantle of legitimacy, although Henry himself insisted he occupied his throne by right of conquest, and not as Elizabeth's husband. Now, after sixteen years, he had obtained recognition by one of the greatest monarchies in the known world, and this in itself did much to consolidate his position.

According to the description of the King given by the Tudor chronicler, Edward Hall, Henry VII was tall and lean, his seeming fragility concealing a sinewy strength. He had gaunt, aquiline features, with thinning, greying hair and grey eyes. He presented to the world a genial, smiling countenance, yet beneath it he was suspicious, devious and parsimonious. He had grown to manhood in an environment of treachery and intrigue, and as a result never knew security. For all this, he ruled wisely and well, overcame plots to depose him, and put an end to the dynastic warfare that had blighted England during the second half of the fifteenth century.

Henry was miserly by nature, but he was also highly sensitive about the dubious validity of his claim to the throne, and therefore took much care to emphasise his majesty on as grand a scale as possible, thus setting a precedent for his Tudor successors. He was prepared to spend huge sums to impress the world with the splendour of his welcome to his daughter-in-law.

When, through an interpreter, pleasantries had been exchanged between the King and the Infanta, Katherine was presented to her future husband, the Prince of Wales, who later informed his parents that he 'had never felt so much joy in his life as when he beheld the

sweet face of his bride'. The only portrait to survive of Prince Arthur is in the Royal Collection at Windsor, and shows a marked resemblance to youthful likenesses of Henry VIII. Arthur had reddish hair, small eyes and a high-bridged nose. In November 1501, he was fifteen years and two months old, while his bride was a month short of sixteen. He was well educated, thanks to his tutors, Dr Thomas Linacre and the poet Bernard André, and much beloved by the English because he so resembled his maternal grandfather, the popular Edward IV. Much of his childhood had been spent at Tickenhill, his manor house at Bewdley, which still survives camouflaged by a Georgian façade; the King favoured this thirteenth-century, oak-beamed house because it was near the Welsh marches, a suitable place for a Prince of Wales to live, particularly this one, who had more Welsh blood in him than any of his predecessors since the native line of Welsh princes died out.

Katherine and Arthur conversed together in Latin; later that evening, Katherine entertained the King and his son in her chamber with music and dancing. She and her ladies danced the slow, stately pavan that permitted two beats to a step; when Arthur joined in, Katherine and one of her ladies taught him a dignified Spanish dance, after which he danced with Lady Guildford in the English style 'right pleasantly and honourably'. In the morning, Henry and Arthur took their leave of Katherine and returned to London to prepare for the wedding, due to take place in ten days' time. The Infanta and her household followed at a more leisurely pace, arriving on 9 November by river at Deptford, where they were received by the Lord Mayor, aldermen and guildsmen of the City, who saluted her from their barges before escorting her to the landing stage at Lambeth. Here, Katherine was welcomed by Edward Stafford, third Duke of Buckingham, one of the few remaining members of the older nobility and a descendant of Edward III, and by the King's younger son, Henry Tudor, Duke of York, a big robust boy of ten with red-gold hair and glowing skin, who was there as his father's representative. These two conducted Katherine to her lodging in Lambeth Palace, where there awaited a letter from the King, expressing his great 'pleasure, joy and consolation' at her coming, and telling her that he and the Queen intended to treat her 'like our own daughter'. These were doubtless heartening words to a girl who

had weathered a long and terrible journey to a strange land, with the prospect ahead of marriage to a virtual stranger. It says much for Katherine's strength of character that she was coping so well; beneath her docile, demure manner, there was an inner toughness and a strong will to succeed that sustained her.

Katherine made her state entry into London on 12 November, two days before her wedding. The streets were lined with expectant citizens jostling for a good view of the procession. The Infanta entered London from Southwark, passing over London Bridge with its huddle of shops and houses and its chapel dedicated to St Thomas à Becket, with her Spanish retinue following her. One person who saw her that day was the young Thomas More, future Lord Chancellor of England, who was then a lawyer at the London Charterhouse. He later wrote of the 'tremendous ovation' Katherine had received from the people: 'She thrilled the hearts of everyone; there is nothing wanting in her that the most beautiful girl should have. Everyone is singing her praises.' About her household, however, he was less than complimentary: 'Good heavens! What a sight! You would have burst out laughing if you had seen them, for they looked so ridiculous: tattered, barefoot, pygmy Ethiopians, like devils out of hell!' The chronicler Edward Hall, relying on the accounts of other eyewitnesses, later described the costly garments of the Princess and her ladies as 'strange fashions adorned with goldsmiths' work and embroidery'.

Katherine had on a wide gown with a gathered skirt over a farthingale with bell-shaped sleeves. The English had never before seen a lady thus attired, and, since she was small in stature, thought the hooped skirt made her look as broad as she was high. She also wore a little hat with a flat crown and wide brim, like a cardinal's, held in place with a gold lace under her chin. Beneath it she wore a Venetian coif covering her ears. Gone was the veil, gone also the litter; instead the Princess showed her face to the world and rode a gaily caparisoned horse. She was accompanied by a retinue of prelates, dignitaries, nobles and knights, all richly dressed in her honour.

The procession wound its way over the bridge, along Fenchurch Street to Cornhill, and then to Cheapside where Katherine was formally welcomed to London by the Lord Mayor. At six places on

her route she stopped to watch elaborate pageants that had been prepared for her entertainment, and on which vast sums of money had been spent, tableaux depicting heraldic, Christian or mythical figures whose purpose it was to laud and praise the future Queen with music and verse. There was even a prefabricated castle surmounted by a fierce Welsh dragon representing the King. In another pageant, the 'Archangel Gabriel' reminded Katherine that her chief duty was 'the procreation of childer', and that this was why the deity had given mankind the capacity for 'sensual lust and appetite'. Later, 'God' himself appeared to her, saying 'Blessed be the fruit of your belly; your substance and fruits I shall increase and multiply.'

When the Lord Mayor and civic dignitaries had presented their loyal address beneath the Eleanor Cross at Cheapside, Katherine and her train passed on to St Paul's Cathedral, where a magnificent service of thanksgiving was the climax to the day's celebrations. Katherine had been the centre of it all, for the King, the Queen and Prince Arthur had watched the procession from the window of Master William Geffrey the haberdasher's house in Cheapside. When the service was over, Katherine rode back to Lambeth through the crowds who shouted acclaim from every street corner.

Two days later those same crowds were back in force for the royal wedding itself. The King and Queen, wearing their crowns and velvet robes trimmed with ermine, sat enthroned on the temporary platform erected outside St Paul's. Elizabeth of York was then thirty-five, and still retained something of her former beauty. Polydore Vergil, Henry VII's official historian, described her as a woman of great character whose chief qualities were wisdom and moderation, and the Venetian ambassador spoke of her great beauty and ability. Yet for all that, she had no political influence, and very little authority in her own household even, which was ordered by the King's mother, the learned and pious Margaret Beaufort.

Elizabeth had borne her husband seven children; three had died young, one, the Princess Mary, was still in the nursery, and the rest now sat with their parents, waiting for the marriage ceremony to begin: Prince Arthur, clad in white satin for the occasion, twelve-year-old Margaret, a headstrong girl who was shortly to marry James IV of Scotland, and Prince Henry, whose duty it was to give

the bride away. Katherine also wore white satin, in the Spanish style, with bell sleeves and a full pleated skirt over a farthingale. On her head she had a huge white-silk coif edged with a border of gold, pearls and precious stones 1½" wide; the coif overshadowed her face, and its lappets hung to her waist. Her ladies, following behind, were similarly attired.

The marriage ceremony was conducted by Henry Deane, Archbishop of Canterbury, assisted by William Warham, Bishop of London. Prince Arthur and his bride made their vows in full view of the crowds before proceeding into the Cathedral for the nuptial mass, which the whole court attended. Then the Prince and Princess of Wales emerged into the November daylight, man and wife at last after thirteen years of hard bargaining; they nodded and bowed to the cheering throng, then rode off in procession to the riverside mansion known as Baynard's Castle, where the wedding banquet was to take place in the great hall. Here, where Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, Edward IV and Richard III had once held court, the couple were entertained by 'the best voiced children of the King's chapel, who sang right sweetly with quaint harmony'. Later, after the feast, doves and rabbits were let loose into the hall, giving much 'mirth and disport' to the company.

Marriage feasts at that time were occasions for hilarity and bawdiness, and this one was no exception. In the evening there was dancing. Whilst Katherine danced in very stately manner, clicking castanets, the young Duke of York threw off his gown and whirled his sister Margaret around the floor, leaping and twirling to the music. The King and Queen were much amused, and watched their son with evident pleasure. Katherine, too, delighted them, dancing gracefully with her new husband; she looked, said an onlooker, 'delectable'.

It was now time for the bride and groom publicly to be put to bed. Arthur, we hear, was feeling 'lusty and amorous', and was anxious to be alone with his pretty wife. The young couple were undressed by their attendants, then brought to the nuptial chamber where they sat side by side in the great tester bed whilst the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London blessed the bed and prayed that their union might be fruitful. The guests departed amidst much mirth and ribaldry, leaving Arthur and Katherine alone behind the

closed curtains. Thus began one of the most controversial wedding nights in history.

What happened? According to Katherine, testifying on oath twenty-seven years later, nothing. To the end of her life, she maintained that her marriage to Prince Arthur was never consummated. The Prince was fifteen at the time of his marriage, and afflicted with a weak constitution. It is doubtful that he was capable of achieving full intercourse. Certainly, according to later reports by eyewitnesses, he bragged about feeling 'lusty', and on the morning after the wedding he boasted that he 'had been in Spain', saying that marriage was 'thirsty work', but these were probably the self-conscious boasts of a boy who had failed in his duty and wanted no one to guess it. It was automatically assumed at the time that the union had been consummated, although when Katherine was widowed she immediately declared that she was still a virgin and that she had only shared a bed with her husband for six or seven nights. At her coronation in 1509, when she was newly married to Henry VIII, she dressed herself in virginal white, and in 1529, she publicly affirmed that, when she married for the second time, 'I was a true maid, without touch of man.' She also swore as much on her deathbed, believing that she was about to meet her Maker. Although she had her own interests to protect, she was a religious woman of sound principles; it is far less likely therefore that she was guilty of deception than that she was telling the truth.

As Princess of Wales, Katherine ranked second lady at court after the Queen, taking precedence even over the King's mother, the formidable Lady Margaret Beaufort, whose word was law on domestic matters until her death in June 1509. For her personal motto, Katherine adopted the device 'Not for my crown', and her badge was the pomegranate. For many days after her wedding there were banquets and revels at court, interspersed with pageants and a tournament.

Outwardly, all was well with the marriage. Arthur wrote to Ferdinand and Isabella, telling them how happy he was and assuring them he would be 'a true and loving husband all of his days'. At the end of November, the Spaniards delivered to King Henry the sum of 100,000 crowns, the first instalment of the Princess's dowry,

whereupon he immediately sent a letter to the sovereigns in which he praised the 'beauty and dignified manners' of their daughter. In himself, he declared, 'you may be sure that she has found a second father who will ever watch over her happiness.'

That night, the wedding celebrations ended with another pageant, acrobats, and singing by the children of the King's chapel. On the following day, those Spaniards who were not to remain in England with Katherine departed for Spain, laden with costly gifts from King Henry. This breaking of yet another link with her homeland was upsetting for the Princess, but the King diverted her by showing her his library and allowing her to choose a ring from a selection presented by his jeweller. Yet this untypical generosity was only one side of the picture. In reality, Henry had his eye on the remaining portion of Katherine's dowry, which was not yet due, and he was well aware that part of it comprised the plate and jewels she had brought with her from Spain, which were not for her personal use but to be given to the King when Ferdinand so directed. Henry, however, preferred hard cash so, with the assistance of the unscrupulous Dr de Puebla, he conceived a plan whereby Katherine would be forced to use the plate and jewels; then, when the time came, he could refuse to accept them, and could ask for their value in money. Puebla had already tried to involve Katherine in this duplicity, but Henry VII told her that, although such an arrangement would be of advantage to them both, he would not consent to it. He would be content with what the treaties stipulated, he told her, and advised her to warn her parents of Dr de Puebla's treachery. Thus, when matters came to a head, they would blame the doctor and not Henry for what had happened.

The King had the ideal opportunity in December to put his plan into action. It had been arranged that after their marriage the Prince and Princess would go to live at Ludlow Castle on the Welsh marches, so that Arthur could learn how to govern his principality and so prepare himself for eventual kingship. But there was concern about the Prince's delicate health. He seems to have been consumptive, and had grown weaker since his wedding. The King believed, as did most other people, that Arthur had been over-exerting himself in the marriage bed. Fate was playing into Henry's hands in this, because it gave him the ideal opportunity to pretend that he did not

want Katherine to accompany her husband to Ludlow. However, he did not wish to risk offending her parents, so he consulted the Spanish envoy, Ayala, who advised that Katherine remain with the court. The King, making a great pretence of deliberation, then asked Katherine herself if she thought it wise to go with Arthur to Ludlow whilst he was in such poor health; Katherine would only say that she would be 'content with what he decided'. Prince Arthur, on the King's instruction, tried to persuade her to go with him, but she was frightened of going against the King's wishes, and in the end Henry, with a great show of reluctance, commanded her to accompany her husband.

Because of all this procrastination, nothing was ready for the Princess's departure, nor had any provision been made for her at Ludlow. All that had been decided was the number of Spanish servants who would accompany her. Prince Arthur, the King had decreed, would pay their salaries out of his own privy purse. Ferdinand was informed by Pedro de Ayala, who had by this time realised what the King planned to do, that Henry had given nothing to Arthur with which to furnish his house, nor any 'table service'; this was a significant omission, for it meant that Katherine would be obliged to use her plate.

Seemingly, Henry VII cared more for money than for the welfare of his son and heir. However, if Henry had shut his eyes to the possible consequences of allowing the Prince and Princess to live together, Ayala and Doña Elvira had not. Both pleaded with the King to let Katherine stay at court, saying the sovereigns would prefer it. Henry replied that Dr Puebla had told him, on the contrary, that Ferdinand and Isabella did not wish the young couple to be separated on any account, and this view had already been endorsed by Alessandro Geraldini, the Princess's chaplain. Defeated, Ayala wrote again to Ferdinand, urging him to command that the plate and jewels be given to Henry at once, to avoid further trouble.

On Tuesday, 21 December 1501, the Prince and Princess left Baynard's Castle for the Welsh marches and Ludlow. It was the middle of winter, and the landscape bare and unforgiving, with skeletal trees blowing in the bitter winds. Katherine travelled by litter, wrapped in furs and accompanied by her duenna; everyone else was on horseback, the Prince included, which cannot have done much to improve his state of health.

Ludlow Castle was an eleventh-century fortress that had been transformed into a palatial residence of imposing grandeur during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It had once been the seat of the powerful Mortimer family and their descendants, the Yorkist Plantagenets. Edward IV had sent his young son, the future Edward V, to be educated here in the 1470s, and it was from Ludlow that the boy king Edward V had set out in 1483 on the road that was to take him to London, the Tower and death. No royal person had lived in Ludlow Castle since then, but a staff had been maintained, and the royal apartments kept in good repair. When the Prince and Princess arrived in January 1502, their servants quickly transformed these rooms with tapestries, roaring fires, personal belongings and the controversial plate. With Prince Arthur was his council, whose members were there to help him learn the art of government; not a hard task, as the Welsh border was quiet now after many centuries of warfare. A Welsh-born king occupied the throne, and his son enjoyed great popularity locally.

Henry VII told Ferdinand and Isabella that Alessandro Geraldini, Katherine's chaplain, 'a venerable man for whom we have the greatest regard', would be keeping him informed of her welfare and Arthur's. It is unfortunate that none of Geraldini's letters survive, as they would have provided us with much valuable information about Katherine's early married life. We can only surmise that hers was the conventional routine of a lady of rank: taking responsibility for the smooth running of her household, entertaining local worthies, and attending to religious and charitable duties. Doubtless she did embroidery and occasionally went hunting. What is certain from her own testimony, is that she did not share a bed with her husband.

In late March, both Katherine and Arthur were struck down with a virus, 'a malign vapour which proceeded from the air'. People died frequently from such illnesses then, but Katherine was lucky, for she was basically healthy and made a quick recovery, although she would suffer unpleasant after-effects. Not so Arthur, who succumbed to the virus on 2 April, leaving his bride of six months a widow in what was still to her a strange land.

At once, a messenger was despatched to the King, who was then at Richmond Palace in Surrey. He had to be roused from sleep by his confessor, who said in Latin: 'If we receive good things at the hands

of God, why may we not endure evil things?' The King was puzzled, wondering why his confessor should be quoting Job to him at this time of night. Then the friar said gently, 'Your dearest son hath departed to God.' Henry burst into harsh sobbing, whereupon the Queen, laying her own grief aside, came to comfort him, reminding him that God had left him three other children, 'and God is still where he was, and we are both young enough'. Then she too broke down, and it was Henry's turn to comfort her.

The Prince's body was embalmed, and conveyed on a chariot to the Abbey of St Wulfstan in Worcester, now the cathedral, where it was interred in its own chantry chapel, later to be adorned with the statues of saints and of the wife with whom Arthur had shared such a brief time. Katherine, conforming to royal tradition, did not attend the funeral. Much sympathy was felt for her; barely out of her sick bed, she was a wan figure in her widow's black and mourning barbe, which swathed her chin and face like a nun's wimple. There was also great grief in the country for the popular Prince who had been cut down in his youth. The new heir to the throne, Henry, Duke of York, was not well known, having been kept out of the public eye for most of his life.

A question mark hovered now over Katherine's future. As soon as she was well enough, she travelled back to London, shrouded in black and hidden from public view by the curtains of a closed litter. When she reached Richmond, she was conducted at once to the Queen, with whom she shared a mutual sorrow. Elizabeth of York would play a mother's part until such time as Katherine's future was decided.

3
Our daughter remains as she was here

On 10 May 1502, Ayala having been recalled, King Ferdinand instructed his new ambassador in England, Hernan Duque de Estrada, to demand the immediate return to Spain of the Princess Katherine and repayment of the first instalment of her dowry. This was intended to frighten Henry VII into agreeing to a new proposition Ferdinand was about to make, that a marriage be arranged between Katherine and the new heir to the English throne, Prince Henry. Ferdinand could foresee only two objections to such a union: first, Katherine, at sixteen, was five and a half years older than the Prince; and second, the Bible forbade a man to marry his brother's widow. Age was deemed to be of little account: in that period, the marriage of children was not unknown, and it was not that long since an octogenarian Duchess of Norfolk had married a man sixty years her junior. Nor would the age gap seem too great when young Henry was of an age to be married.

That left the delicate matter of the couple being within the forbidden degrees of affinity. Ferdinand was certain that the Pope would be only too happy to provide a dispensation if it could be shown that Katherine's marriage to Arthur had not been consummated – and immediately the intimate details of their short-lived union became a matter of international importance. 'Be careful to get the truth as regards whether the Prince and Princess of Wales consummated the marriage,' Queen Isabella instructed Estrada, who, prevented by decorum from asking Katherine outright, was

driven to making discreet enquiries of the ladies of her household and even of her laundresses.

Henry VII was not so delicate, and bluntly asked Katherine if she were still a virgin. He, too, had seen the advantages of her marrying Prince Henry, but he was also hopeful that she might be pregnant with Arthur's child. She replied, quite candidly, that although she had slept with Arthur for six nights, she remained a virgin, and had confided as much to her duenna. Henry told her he was thinking of suggesting that she be betrothed to Prince Henry, but that he would prefer it if the matter was first broached by her parents. Whatever happened, he wanted to preserve the Anglo-Spanish alliance intact.

Gossip travelled fast in the court, and it was not long before the proposed betrothal was common knowledge. Reaction was swift, especially among some churchmen. William Warham, Bishop of London, who had officiated at Katherine's wedding, thought the idea 'not only inconsistent with propriety, but the will of God Himself is against it. It is declared in His law that if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing. It is not lawful.' This was one of the finer points of canon law, and a heated debate ensued which resulted in the King being assured by learned divines that the Pope would almost certainly grant a dispensation, since the Princess was still a virgin. Even if she were not, the Pope, were he so inclined (and persuaded with financial incentives), still had the power to dispense in such a case: there were precedents. Nevertheless, although their voices were muted, Warham and several other churchmen still maintained their stand.

Henry VII and Ferdinand and Isabella were now agreed on the match; Henry had written to Isabella, recounting his conversation with Katherine, and the Queen pronounced herself satisfied that 'our daughter remains as she was here' – that is, a virgin. The sovereigns made the signing of the new marriage treaty a priority, as there were rumours of a proposed French marriage for Prince Henry; Louis XII of France was said to be trying to block the betrothal to Katherine. Estrada was given full powers to draw up the treaty; Henry VII would be allowed to keep the first instalment of Katherine's dowry, and the final payment would be handed over when the Princess's marriage to Prince Henry was consummated. Isabella instructed Estrada to ensure that King Henry provided Katherine in the interim

with whatever was necessary for her maintenance; in return, he should have the final say in how her household should be constituted, provided Doña Elvira remained as duenna. If Henry proved difficult, the ambassador was to make immediate arrangements for Katherine's return to Spain with her dowry intact. 'The one object of this business is to bring the betrothal to a conclusion as soon as you are able,' wrote the Queen.

Several weeks passed in negotiation. Naturally, no one saw fit to consult the two people most closely concerned: Henry was a boy of eleven, Katherine not yet seventeen, and both were drilled in strict obedience to their elders. The prospect of betrothal to a mere child cannot have been welcome to the Princess, deferring as it did her prospects of motherhood, yet she had been told that her destiny was to be Queen of England, and that she very much wished to be. At present, her life was humdrum, filled with religious observances, needlework, and quiet sociability in the Queen's apartments. As a widow, it was not thought fitting for her to dance in public or take part in court entertainments. A betrothal to Prince Henry would end all that, however, and thus Katherine may well have come to view it as a desirable escape from her present situation.

But there was to be further delay. Just as Estrada proceeded to draw up the marriage contract, Queen Elizabeth, who had conceived her eighth child soon after Prince Arthur's death, bore a daughter in the royal apartments in the Tower of London, and died soon afterwards on her thirty-seventh birthday, 11 February 1503. 'Her departing was as heavy and dolorous to the King as ever was seen or heard of,' and the court was plunged into mourning. Katherine, keeping vigil by the Queen's body with the other ladies of her court in the Norman chapel of St John the Evangelist within the Tower, sincerely mourned her gentle mother-in-law, and no doubt felt lonelier than ever. Prince Henry, too, felt the loss of his mother deeply. It has been suggested that his future matrimonial career reflected his subconscious efforts to replace her; it cannot be doubted that Elizabeth's memory always held a special place in his heart, and in time to come he would name one of his daughters after her.

No sooner had the Queen been buried in Westminster Abbey than the matter of the King's own remarriage was broached. Only the life of Prince Henry stood between stable Tudor government and

bloody civil war, and it was thought imperative that the King remarry and provide his realm with more male heirs, especially as he was 'but a weak man and sickly'. It was at this juncture that the odious Dr de Puebla stepped in and suggested to the King that, rather than marry Katherine to his son, he marry her himself. The idea appealed to Henry, but it left Isabella and Ferdinand shocked and furious. The Queen wrote to Puebla, severely censuring him for his meddling, but her anger was provoked not so much by sensitivity about a middle-aged widower of eight weeks proposing himself as a groom for a young girl, as by her fears for Katherine's status. Henry VII was known to be ailing, and was probably in the first stages of the consumption that was eventually to kill him; the best Katherine could hope for from such a marriage was a brief reign as queen consort, then a long widowhood, commencing perhaps in her twenties, with no political influence. Marriage to Prince Henry would assure her of a far more stable and glorious future.

The practical Isabella suggested an alternative bride for the King, the widowed Joan of Naples, a relative of King Ferdinand, who was young and beautiful, as her portrait by Raphael shows. At the same time, Isabella commanded Estrada to tell Henry VII that a marriage between him and Katherine was 'a thing not to be endured'. Estrada played his part well: Henry, not wishing to offend Spain, and realising that he stood to lose not only Katherine but her dowry if he did so, immediately abandoned any notion of marrying her himself, and proceeded at once to conclude the treaty of betrothal between the Princess and his son. There was further haggling over the dowry, but eventually it was agreed that the remaining 100,000 crowns would be paid as soon as the marriage was consummated, and would be made up of 65,000 crowns in gold, 15,000 crowns in plate of gold and silver, and 20,000 crowns in jewellery, the plate and jewellery already being in the possession of the Princess.

The marriage itself was to take place in 1505, when Prince Henry reached his fourteenth birthday. In the meantime, Ferdinand and Isabella and Henry VII would request the Pope for a dispensation that would resolve all canonical difficulties. The treaty was signed by Henry VII on 23 June 1503, and two days later the Duke of York and Katherine of Aragon were formally betrothed in the Bishop of Salisbury's house in London's Fleet Street. Mourning weeds discarded,

Katherine appeared once more garbed in virginal white, her golden hair unbound and falling loose as a token of purity, with her future assured and her status at court preserved.

Prince Henry, who was not quite twelve, had conceived for her from the first both affection and respect. She aroused the chivalrous instincts of a boy who had been bred on knightly precepts, and who was already manifesting the charm and charisma that would in time attract people of both sexes to him. Katherine, for all her five and a half years' seniority, was beginning to fall under the spell. There was in her a strong maternal streak, and this boy had just lost his mother. She would be the one to comfort and console him, perhaps even guide him. Thus was set, early on, a pattern for the future.

The future Henry VIII had been born on 28 June 1491 at the Palace of Greenwich, which remained a favourite residence to the end of his life. In 1492, when he was less than nine months old, his father appointed him Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports and Constable of Dover Castle, and in that same year a sister, Elizabeth, joined him in the nursery; unfortunately, she died at the age of three. Later, there were other siblings, Mary, Edmund, Edward and Katherine (the baby born in the Tower), but only Mary survived infancy. Henry was particularly fond of Mary, much more so than of his elder sister Margaret, who married the King of Scots in 1503.

The young Prince was made Lord Lieutenant of Ireland at the age of three, as well as being admitted to the Order of the Bath. He was then created Duke of York, following the precedent set by Edward IV, and continued to this day, whereby the second son of the monarch is always given this title. To celebrate the event, the King held a joust and set his son on a table so that he could see properly. A portrait sketch of Henry at two shows him to have been a chubby, solidly made toddler with wide, intelligent eyes and a straight fringe of Tudor red hair; he wears a gown with a square neck and a wide-brimmed bonnet with a coif beneath, tied under the chin; altogether a child to be proud of.

The young Duke was made a Knight of the Garter in 1495, just before his fourth birthday. Shortly afterwards, he commenced his formal education, with the poet laureate John Skelton as his first tutor, who taught him reading, writing and spelling. Later, a more

classical curriculum was introduced, and Henry would study the works of Homer, Virgil, Plautus, Ovid, Thucydides, Livy, Julius Caesar, Pliny, and other Greek and Roman authors. He was taught to write a sprawling Italic script, and received instruction in mathematics, French and music, a subject at which he would excel. The growing Prince found an outlet for his energy in the coaching that was given him daily in horsemanship, archery, fencing, jousting, wrestling, swordsmanship and royal (real) tennis. Erasmus, who saw Henry in 1499, when he was eight, called him a 'prodigy of precocious scholarship'. At only seven years old, he had performed his first public duty, attending a meeting of the City of London trade guilds to be presented by the Lord Mayor with a pair of gilt goblets. The Prince thanked them in a clear high voice for their 'great and kind remembrance', and told them he would not forget their kindness. Nor did he, for to the end of his life Henry VIII enjoyed a relationship of mutual liking with the City of London.

He was maturing fast. At eight, according to Erasmus, he already had 'something of royalty in his demeanour, in which there was a certain dignity combined with singular courtesy'. The death of Prince Arthur in 1502 brought about a cataclysmic change in Henry's life, since it made him the heir to his father's kingdom and immeasurably increased his importance. Yet for all that he enjoyed no greater freedom. His father, who had already lost three sons, insisted that the Prince lead an almost cloistered life with his tutors, avoiding the public eye, and Henry's bedchamber was only accessible from a door in his father's room. His contact with his future wife was to be strictly limited for the present.

In August 1503, Ferdinand instructed his ambassador in Rome to procure the necessary dispensation from the Pope, saying that while it was 'well known in England that the Princess is still a virgin', he thought it 'more prudent to provide for the case as though the marriage had been consummated'. A watertight dispensation was vital because 'the right of succession depends on the undoubted legitimacy of the marriage'. The Pope, Julius II, was disposed to prevaricate, saying he did not know if he was competent to grant it. Moreover, there were conflicting texts in the Bible: Leviticus forbade a man to marry his brother's wife and warned that such unions

would be cursed with childlessness, while Deuteronomy positively encouraged them. There had, however, been precedents, which proved that other Popes had had fewer qualms. In the end, ambassadorial pressure persuaded Julius to relent, and on 26 December 1503, he issued the desired Bull of Dispensation permitting Henry and Katherine to marry, notwithstanding the fact that she had 'perhaps' consummated her first marriage 'by carnal knowledge'. The young couple were now free to marry when Henry was fourteen in June 1505. On 18 February 1504, he was formally created Prince of Wales.

During 1504 Katherine suffered a period of poor health, with intermittent attacks of a mysterious sickness that has been attributed to her inability to adapt to the English climate and food. The illness seems to have been gastric, producing symptoms of shivering and fever, and it was at its worst during the summer, when the Princess was unable to eat very much. She grew alarmingly pale, and there were fears that she would die. For weeks she lay ill at Greenwich, until she was well enough to travel to Fulham Palace, a country house owned by the Bishop of London which had been placed at her disposal. The move did her little good, for in August she was reported to be 'rather worse' and in a serious condition. The King sent every day to ask after her health, offering many times to visit her, though she was too ill to receive him. Perturbed, Henry wrote to inform her parents of her illness. The news could not have reached them at a worse time, for Queen Isabella herself was mortally sick. Katherine, of course, had no knowledge of this, yet as her condition improved, so her mother's deteriorated, and by November Isabella herself realised she was about to die. On her deathbed, she voiced her inner doubts about the validity of the dispensation issued by the Pope, but these were unresolved and largely ignored when she died on 26 November 1504.

There was great mourning in Spain for the death of a queen who had been a legend in her lifetime, but it was not only because of her passing. The kingdom would once more be divided, if only for the lifetime of King Ferdinand. He, not being Isabella's heir, could no longer hold sovereignty over Castile: that kingdom would pass to the Queen's eldest daughter, Juana, and Ferdinand – who had for thirty years ruled a united Spain – now found his authority confined

solely to the minor kingdom of Aragon. It would not be long before this situation had repercussions for Katherine.

Katherine wrote to her father on the very day Isabella died, chiding him for not having written to her for some time. Weakened by her illness, she may well have been suffering from depression, for she felt there was something ominous about Ferdinand's silence. 'I cannot be comforted or cheerful until I see a letter from you,' she wrote; 'I have no other hope or comfort in this world than that which comes from knowing my mother and father are well.'

Any depression Katherine felt was not just the result of her illness, however. Since arriving in England, she had come to know a freedom she had never dreamed of in Spain, where women were kept in seclusion and observed an almost conventual style of life. They wore clothes that camouflaged their bodies and veiled their faces in public. Etiquette at the Spanish court was rigid, and even smiling was frowned upon. But in England, women enjoyed much more freedom: their gowns were designed to attract, and when they were introduced to gentlemen they kissed them full upon the lips in greeting. They sang and danced when they pleased, went out in public as the fancy took them, and laughed when they felt merry. Of course, there were rules of behaviour governing their conduct at court, which was expected to be decorous and formal, but this bore favourable comparison with the conventions then existing in Katherine's native land. To the maturing Princess, exposure to these unfamiliar freedoms brought with it a desire for some measure of independence and liberation from the restrictions hitherto imposed upon her. Several courtiers had told her that she 'ought to enjoy greater freedom', and, indeed, since her betrothal to Prince Henry, she had by degrees entered into the wider life of the court whenever her illness permitted. She had danced and sung, gone riding, taken part in the chase, and generally begun to enjoy herself.

Doña Elvira had been scandalised by such behaviour on the part of her charge, and was concerned that Katherine might cheapen herself in the eyes of the English. So concerned was the duenna that she complained both to King Henry and King Ferdinand. Ferdinand replied that Katherine must behave 'as was fitting for her honour and dignity', and commanded his daughter to observe the same rules at court as Doña Elvira insisted upon in her own house, and Henry VII

endorsed this, saying the Princess must obey her father's orders. Katherine therefore had no choice but to do so, but from that time on relations between her and Doña Elvira were merely civil at best.

Katherine's spirits, therefore, were at a low ebb: she was debilitated by a lengthy illness, depressed by the lack of news from Spain, and chafing at the unwelcome restrictions imposed upon her, feeling very much that she was kept apart from the normal mainstream of life. And then came the news that her mother was dead.

There is no record of how Isabella's death affected Katherine on a personal level. We do know that politically it affected her a great deal, because, when news of it reached England in December 1504, and Henry VII had had time to think about its implications, he realised that he had concluded a marriage alliance, not with a strong, united Spain, but with the kingdom of Aragon, to which far less prestige was attached. This fact devalued Katherine's importance overnight and diminished her status in the world. Henry VII was the first to perceive that she was no longer the personification of a great Spanish alliance. Other, more advantageous marriages might be considered more appropriate for his son and, with this in mind, Henry VII now acted: he stopped Katherine's allowance.

By February 1505, Katherine was beginning to feel the pinch. Although she was living with the court at Richmond and did not lack for daily comforts and food, she had no money with which to pay her servants, and this was very embarrassing for her. She had also noticed a certain coolness in the King's attitude towards her, which troubled her, for she did not understand how she had offended him. She asked Dr de Puebla to remind Henry 'of the misery in which she lives, and to tell him, in plain language, that it will reflect dishonour upon his character if he should entirely abandon his daughter,' but Puebla did nothing except write to King Ferdinand asking him to clarify the position concerning financial provision for Katherine. In the meantime, Katherine's circumstances worsened. The clothes she had brought from Spain were now growing shabby, and she could not afford to replace them. Her attendants made no complaints, but she could sense their concern over the non-payment of their salaries. Then there was Doña Elvira clucking about decorum and propriety and the correct behaviour to be observed by a princess of Spain.

Katherine, still grieving for her mother, was nearly at breaking-point.

Ferdinand did not reply to Puebla until the end of June, and when he did it was to say, quite correctly, that it was King Henry's responsibility to 'provide abundantly for the Princess and her household'. This was little help to Katherine: etiquette prevented her from asking the King of England outright for money, and Puebla would not do it for her, so she was obliged literally to tighten her belt and endure what could not be remedied. Nor was there any end to her plight in view. On 28 June 1505, Prince Henry reached his fourteenth birthday, and by the terms of the marriage treaty should have been married to Katherine soon afterwards. However, it was becoming increasingly obvious that no immediate plans for a wedding were being laid. Henry VII had decided that, if a better match presented itself for the Prince, he would take it, but at the same time he was reluctant to forgo Katherine's dowry. Hence his policy was to delay the marriage for as long as possible to see what transpired.

Katherine, of course, did not know this, and could only guess at the reason for her marriage being postponed. Fortunately for her peace of mind, she was unaware that on the day before the Prince's birthday, the King had marched him before the Bishop of Winchester and made the boy solemnly revoke the promises made at his betrothal, on the grounds that they were made when he was a minor and incapable under the law of deciding such things for himself. The purpose of this little drama, which took place in secret, was to ensure that, if a better match presented itself, there would be no difficulty in breaking his precontract to Katherine.

4
Pain and annoyance

In October 1505, Henry VII entered into secret negotiations with the new King and Queen of Castile for the marriage of the newly created Prince of Wales to Philip's and Juana's six-year-old daughter Eleanor. Philip, antagonistic towards his father-in-law because of Ferdinand's interference in Castilian affairs, saw this marriage as a means of exacting revenge. At the same time, it was widely believed in diplomatic circles that King Henry was having doubts as to the validity of a union between his son and Katherine of Aragon, despite the Pope's dispensation: it was said to weigh 'much on his conscience'. However, the main reason for his change of direction was that Eleanor was a far greater matrimonial prize than Katherine: not only was her mother Queen Regnant of Castile and heir to Aragon, but her father was heir to all the Hapsburg territories and might one day be Holy Roman Emperor as well.

It is clear that Katherine herself had not yet understood how her mother's death had led to her own devaluation in the marriage market; it was some time before she thought she knew why Henry VII was treating her so shabbily, and why the Prince, whom she saw sometimes about the court, was dutifully ignoring her. Eventually, it occurred to her that perhaps her father's failure to hand over the second instalment of her dowry might be the cause of the problem, and in December she asked Ferdinand to substitute a payment of gold for the jewels and plate in her possession, as she felt certain that the King of England would refuse to receive them as part of the

instalment. Ferdinand promised to do as she asked, but failed to keep his word. By April 1506, Henry VII – who had been led by Katherine to expect prompt payment of the second instalment – complained bitterly about the delay, and began to cast doubt upon Ferdinand's good intentions.

By the terms of the marriage treaty, Ferdinand was well within his rights to withhold the remainder of the dowry until the union between the Prince and Princess was consummated, but he did not stand on this and chose instead to prevaricate, make excuses, and offer promises he did not keep, primarily because he needed to retain the friendship of Henry VII. According to Katherine, this provoked rage and fury in Henry VII, and she bore the brunt of it. In March 1507, he granted Ferdinand a further six months' grace in which to hand over payment, although he sanctimoniously reminded him at the time that 'punctual payment' was a 'sacred duty', and warned him that 'many other princesses have been offered in marriage to the Prince of Wales with greater marriage portions'. For Katherine, it was vital that her father complied with King Henry's wishes in order to 'prevent these people from telling me that they have reduced me to nothingness'. Yet when October arrived, Henry magnanimously extended the term of grace until March 1508. Katherine, rightly, saw this as ominous, for while the dowry remained unpaid, 'he regards me as bound and his son as free.'

In December, Ferdinand was in Castile, doing his best to raise the enormous sum required to complete the dowry, and promising Henry VII to deliver it before March. But when March came, and Ferdinand had still not paid up, Henry VII lost patience and reopened negotiations for a marriage between the Prince and Eleanor of Austria.

During the summer of 1508, Ferdinand, fearing for Katherine's future, insisted Henry VII keep faith with the terms of the treaty. But Henry, whose health was failing, was determined to have the dowry before committing his son to the marriage. 'Your King has many crowns,' he sneered to the Spanish ambassador, 'but he hasn't 100,000 to pay his daughter's dowry!' The ambassador, a tactless man named Fuensalida, retorted that his master did not 'lock away his gold in chests' – a direct reference to Henry VII's legendary miserliness – 'but pays it to the brave soldiers at whose head he has

always been victorious'. The obvious insult stung Henry to fury, and he marched the ambassador along to Katherine's apartments, saying, 'The Princess shall see how you handle her affairs!' In front of an astonished and distressed Katherine, he accused Fuensalida of jeopardising her marriage by his failure to press her father for the dowry, and warned her that he was not obliged in the circumstances to honour his part of the treaty.

In April 1509, at last, the final instalment of the dowry, 100,000 crowns in gold – Ferdinand had graciously consented to make good the value of the used plate and jewels – was ready to be delivered. Furthermore, a new ambassador, Don Luis Caroz, was to be sent to England empowered to inform Henry VII that it would be paid as soon as the King agreed to proceed with the marriage. However, when Caroz arrived in England, he found the King too ill to see him: Henry VII was dying, and the political situation was about to change dramatically.

During those four years of tortuous negotiations over Katherine's dowry, she herself suffered untold misery and humiliation. Her marriage to Prince Henry was never a certainty, and this placed her in a highly invidious position at the English court. At best, she was regarded there as a possible but ill-advised bride for the Prince, at worst as an unwanted dependant. Throughout this time she was very much the pawn of ambitious men, her happiness subject to the shifting vicissitudes of European politics.

Katherine's domestic life during her widowhood was anything but tranquil. In 1505, Durham House on London's Strand was placed at her disposal by the Bishop of Ely, whose town residence it was. Hitherto, she had lived either at court or at Fulham Palace, a house belonging to the Bishop of London. Durham House was sited to the east of Charing Cross, just beyond the City boundary and in an area populated mainly by the nobility and gentry, whose houses lined the Strand. Here, in peaceful and attractive surroundings, Katherine's household was briefly established. The house was built around a courtyard, and had two towers, one at each extremity. There were lawns and gardens leading down to the River Thames, where there was a jetty and landing stage. In those days persons of rank rarely

travelled through London's noisome and congested streets, preferring to go by barge along the river.

In November 1505, Katherine was deprived of this peaceful refuge. Her duenna had to go abroad for a time, and Henry VII summoned Katherine to live at court, in order to save the cost of maintaining a separate establishment for her. Reluctantly, and with a depleted household, she obeyed the King's command, but she was extremely unhappy about doing so, knowing that there was little privacy to be had at court and that she would doubtless be the object of much speculation and gossip. Nevertheless, she was obliged to remain there for the next year.

Her lack of money brought further problems, especially concerning her household. In 1505 she employed mostly Spaniards on her staff, the majority of whom had come from Spain with her. Many were girls from noble families who had come to England in the hope of attracting aristocratic husbands, and Katherine knew she was obliged to provide dowries for them, when the time came, out of the income due to her from the King, which of course had ceased in the summer of 1505.

A case in point was that of Doña Maria de Salinas, who had once been a maid of honour to Queen Isabella. Her family had arranged her marriage to a noble Fleming, whom she was anxious to marry. Katherine, having no money at all, begged her father to provide a dowry, 'as Maria has served me well', but Ferdinand ignored her request. As a result, plans for the marriage had to be abandoned, to Katherine's great embarrassment and sorrow. Yet such was her ability to inspire devotion in others that Maria de Salinas remained close to her for three more decades until death severed the friendship.

Lack of money affected Katherine personally too. By December 1505, nearly a year after Henry VII had stopped her allowance, her financial situation was grave. Her father had failed to send her any money, despite repeated requests, and all King Henry had given her was a small pittance for food – she was often reduced to eating yesterday's fish from the market. She was also in debt to some London merchants for household necessities, and the gowns she had brought from Spain four years before were so shabby that she felt, as she told her father, 'nearly naked'. At Christmas, she had a humiliating interview with King Henry, who refused to pay her